

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE SCRUTINY STEERING BOARD

TUESDAY, 29TH JULY 2008, AT 6.00 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillors D. L. Pardoe (Chairman), A. N. Blagg, Mrs. M. Bunker,
S. R. Colella and C. B. Taylor

Observers: Mr. J. Edwards (Lead Official)

Officers: Mr. K. Dicks, Mr. T. Beirne, Mrs. D. Warren and Ms. D. McCarthy

18/08 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Dr. G. H. Lord.

19/08 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest or whipping arrangements were made.

20/08 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Meeting of the Scrutiny Steering Board held on 1st July 2008 were submitted.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting be approved as a correct record.

21/08 **SCRUTINY REQUEST - BLUE BADGE HOLDERS**

The Board considered the scrutiny request which had been submitted by a member of the public, Mr. L. Irving, Vice-Chairman of the Older People's Forum in Bromsgrove. The scrutiny request related to abolishing car parking charges for Blue Badge holders.

There was detailed discussion on this item, particularly relating to the scrutiny investigation undertaken by the Car Parking Task Group last year, the funding and use of shopmobility and the need to consult disabled users.

Members were informed that there was a Disabled User Group which the Board could consult and it was stated that there had been detailed discussions with the Group around concessions previously.

The Board had questions around whether discretion was used by car parking attendants in relation to Blue Badge holders and whether policy changes had achieved the objectives set. Members considered the options open to them as stated within the report and believed that further information was required.

RESOLVED that Councillor G. N. Denaro (as the Portfolio Holder for Finance and as the Member who led the Car Parking scrutiny investigation in 2007), Councillor Mrs. J. M. L. A. Griffiths (as the Portfolio Holder for Street Scene and Community Safety) and the Transport and Engineering Officer be requested to attend the next meeting of the Scrutiny Steering Board to discuss this issue, including past decisions taken relating to Blue Badges and any further information to date which will assist the Board in making a decision on how this matter should be dealt with.

22/08 **BROMSGROVE TOWN CENTRE CONSULTATION**

Members considered a progress report on the Bromsgrove Town Centre redevelopment and the consultation surrounding the Issues and Options. There was a lengthy discussion on this matter and several questions were raised which were answered by the Chief Executive.

It was clarified that the Bromsgrove Town Centre Area Action Plan Issues and Options paper put forward options rather than suggestions so to provide consultees with 'food for thought'.

It was explained that results would be analysed and would form the basis of the preferred option. It was anticipated that further consultation relating to the preferred option would be carried out in early 2009.

The Board was informed that it was a long term strategy and due to planning constraints there were statutory timescales which had to be followed. However, it was expected that some initiatives would be progressed more quickly.

The Chairman urged Members of the Board to complete the questionnaire to ensure their views would be considered. The Board as a whole was also given the opportunity to put forward general comments and views which it wished officers to take into consideration.

Reference was made to likely requests relating to encouraging Hagley residents to visit Bromsgrove town centre.

Members of the Board discussed whether the needs of young people (particularly aged 14-20 years) were being addressed as there was a concern that the consultation document lacked focus on activities and places for young people in and around the town centre. Some options were discussed and it was believed that it was important that other aspects such as housing for young people and families were linked.

There were some concerns relating to the accessibility of the questionnaire for all local residents across the whole of the District. It was also believed that the questionnaire should be readily available throughout the consultation period.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that, as part of the town centre regeneration, careful consideration be given regarding the necessity for facilities for young people to ensure their needs were met;
- (b) that the Chief Executive consult the Senior Projects Manager (Mr. R. Savory) regarding ensuring the questionnaire was easily accessible to all local residents across the District and that the Board be updated on this matter; and
- (c) that the report be noted.

23/08 **OFFICER RESPONSES TO SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Consideration was given to a report on a proposal to allow relevant Heads of Service the opportunity to comment in writing on scrutiny recommendations during the scrutiny process.

It was explained that rather than Heads of Service formally commenting on scrutiny recommendations at a Cabinet Meeting, it was proposed that the relevant Head of Service should be requested to give a brief written comment earlier on in the process and this would be first considered by the relevant Scrutiny Task Group.

It was clarified that if Heads of Service did not support a recommendation, it did not mean the Task Group or Scrutiny Steering Board would have to amend or withdraw a particular recommendation. It was also agreed that Scrutiny Members should be probing and challenging officers and other witnesses during a scrutiny investigation. However, there was still concern that having a form for Heads of Service to complete and submit to the Task Group, Scrutiny Steering Board and Cabinet regarding scrutiny recommendations could restrain scrutiny and it might be seen as a 'gatekeeping' exercise.

RESOLVED that rather than the relevant Heads of Service completing a form commenting on scrutiny recommendations (as proposed within the report), the views of the relevant Heads of Service be sought by a Task Group on all scrutiny recommendations before a Scrutiny Report is finalised and submitted to the Scrutiny Steering Board.

24/08 **AMENDMENTS TO CURRENT TASK GROUPS**

The Board considered the report which outlined minor changes to the current two Task Groups.

RESOLVED:

- (a) that the membership form for the Anti-Social Behaviour and Alcohol Free Zones Task Group received from Councillor Miss D. H. Campbell, as requested, be noted; and
- (b) that the minor alteration to the Refuse and Recycling Task Group's terms of reference of replacing "level of service and cost" in the first three bullet points with "level, performance and cost of service" be approved.

25/08 **UPDATES ON SCRUTINY TASK GROUPS**

Anti-Social Behaviour and Alcohol Free Zones Task Group

Councillor C. B. Taylor, Task Group Chairman, informed the Board of the progress made by the above Task Group during the two meetings held since the last meeting of the Board.

It was reported that at the last meeting (which Members of the Board who were not on the Task Group had been invited to attend), Chief Inspector Love had been in attendance to present his views on the issues faced by West Mercia Police which the Task Group found very useful.

Refuse and Recycling Task Group – Value for Money

An update from the Task Group Chairman, Councillor C. R. Scurrill, was read out to the Board which informed Members that the Task Group had agreed a programme of work.

RESOLVED that the verbal updates provided be noted.

26/08 **JOINT COUNTYWIDE FLOODING SCRUTINY UPDATE**

The Chairman, who was the Council's representative on the Joint Countywide Flooding Scrutiny Task Group, reminded the Board that as the last Task Group Meeting had been held on the same day as a full Council Meeting, he had been unable to attend. However, he had received an update from officers.

It was reported that a draft scrutiny report had been discussed at the last meeting and comments had been made on the recent Pitt Review recommendations. It had been agreed that recommendations from the Pitt Review would need to be cross referenced. A number of other amendments to the draft report had also been agreed and further information had been requested.

It was explained that the report would include recommendations to a number of organisations, including local authorities and it was anticipated that final recommendations would be agreed at the next meeting due to be held on 6th August 2008. It was hoped that the final report would be ready for the Board to consider at its meeting scheduled to be held on 30th September 2008.

RESOLVED that the update provided by the Chairman on the progress of the Joint Countywide Flooding Scrutiny be noted.

27/08 **FORWARD PLAN**

Consideration was given to the Forward Plan which included key and non-key decisions due to be taken over the forthcoming months.

The Board discussed each key decision in turn and questions raised were answered by officers present.

In relation to the Sports Strategy, clarification was sought regarding whether it included all young people or focussed on certain age groups. It was believed that the Strategy covered everyone and was not aimed at any one group.

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan be noted.

28/08 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Board considered all the items included within its Work Programme.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Steering Board's Work Programme be noted and be updated accordingly.

The meeting closed at 7.50 p.m.

Chairman